

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A bacterial strain which has lost the phytopathogenic nature by inactivation of at least one virulence gene of the *hrp* or *hrc* gene group, and which has conserved the ability to produce exopolysaccharide and which does not contain DNA which is not a natural element of its genome, wherein said bacterial strain is of the species *Xanthomonas*.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Previously Presented) The bacterial strain as claimed in claim 1, which has been made stably nonphytopathogenic by inactivation of 5 to 9 genes of the *hrp* or *hrc* gene group.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Previously Presented) The *Xanthomonas* strain as claimed in claim 1 [[4]], which is of the species *Xanthomonas campestris*.

6. (Previously Presented) The *Xanthomonas* strain as claimed in claim 5, which is *Xanthomonas campestris* *pv campestris*.

7. (Currently Amended) The *Xanthomonas* strain as claimed in claim 1, wherein the inactivation of said gene(s) is obtained by deletion of a region of DNA of at least 1 kb, in the *hrp* or *hrc* gene group, and wherein the strain it conserves the ability to produce exopolysaccharide.

8. (Previously Presented) The *Xanthomonas* strain as claimed in claim 1, which comprises a deletion of a region of DNA of at most 40 kb.

9. (Previously Presented) The *Xanthomonas* strain as claimed in claim 8, which is obtained by deletion of all or part of the *hrp A1* to *hrpC2 genes*.

10. (Currently Amended) An essentially nonphytopathogenic *Xanthomonas* strain comprising a deletion of a region of DNA of at least 1 kb, in the *hrp* or *hrc* gene group, and wherein the strain it conserves the ability to produce exopolysaccharide.

11. (Currently Amended) An essentially nonphytopathogenic *Xanthomonas* strain, obtained by deletion of all or part of the *hrp A1-C2 genes*, wherein the strain conserves the ability to produce exopolysacchride.

12. (Currently Amended) An essentially nonphytopathogenic *Xanthomonas campestris* strain, selected from the group consisting of BIOCAT 1016, BIOCAT 1017, BIOCAT 1019, BIOCAT 1021 and BIOCAT 1022 strains,

deposited at the CBS under the numbers CBS 101940, CBS 101941, CBS 101942, CBS 101943 and CBS 101944, respectively wherein the strains conserve the ability to produce exopolysaccharide.

13. (Currently Amended) The *Xanthomonas* strain as claimed in claim 1 [[4]], wherein the exopolysaccharide is a xanthan gum.

14. (Currently Amended) A method for preparing the strain as claimed in claim 9, comprising introducing using a pRPA-BCAT 140 plasmid into a *Xanthomonas* strain.

15. (Previously Presented) A method for preparing a strain as claimed in claim 7, wherein the strain is obtained by homologous recombination with a plasmid comprising a deletion of all or part of the *hrp* or *hrc* genes.

16. (Previously Presented) A method for preparing bacterial exopolysaccharide, comprising culturing a bacterial strain as claimed in claim 1 under conditions which allow the production of exopolysaccharide in the fermentation medium.

17. (Previously Presented) A nucleic acid comprising the nucleotide sequence SEQ ID No. 3.

18. (Previously Presented) A nucleic acid comprising the nucleotide sequence SEQ ID No. 6.

19. (Previously Presented) A nucleic acid comprising the nucleotide sequence SEQ ID No. 7.